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CAPITOL SPOTLIGHT
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"WAR AGAINST TOBACCO"

It is a shame that so few Americans know just how much our country suffers as a result of the tobacco industry. By now every literate person is aware of the fact that smoking is the number one cause of lung cancer and a major contributor to other life-threatening illnesses. However, few people realize this menace is directly subsidized by the Federal government.

I have joined together with a number of other congressmen in expressing absolute opposition to the use of federal funds to support the tobacco industry. In a detailed letter to Rep. E de la Garza, Chairman of the House Committee on Agriculture, we stated, "We categorically oppose any tobacco legislation brought up under suspension of the rules or a closed rule. We respectfully request a full, comprehensive debate on any tobacco legislation brought to the House floor."

The tobacco industry has always relied on devious parliamentary maneuvering to prevent the full Congress from seriously examining the issue. We believe the Federal supports on which the tobacco industry relies will crumble once Congress examines the ties between tobacco subsidies, sickness, and death.

For years we have been told that we must continue tobacco subsidies in order to assure the economic survival of the family tobacco farmer. The tobacco industry has tried to hide behind a Grant Wood Gothic depiction of the hard-working tobacco farmer and his family whose lives depend on Federal crop support.

This depiction of the function of the tobacco subsidy program is utterly false. The current system has proven to be catastrophic for small family farms. Feudalistic allotment rents take away virtually all of a farmer's hard-earned profit and transfer it to private investors who hold the allotments. Recent reports by Congressional committees and by the press document that the current system is forcing many tobacco farmers into bankruptcy.

Even if the subsidy program were working out well for tobacco farmers and their families, I would oppose it. I can see no justification for endangering the health of an entire nation just to provide financial security for a relatively small number of farmers. If worse

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came to worse, I would rather see the farmers on welfare than growing tobacco. More to the point, tobacco is grown on fertile soil where other agricultural commodities grow equally well. This consideration would loom large were it not for the current tobacco program.

I see the tobacco question not as one of agricultural policy or even public health, but one of morality and, indeed, religious belief. I was fascinated by an article authored by Fred Rosner, M.D., an Orthodox Jewish physician. Writing in the Journal of Halacha and Contemporary Society, Dr. Rosner called on rabbinical scholars to prohibit smoking. He cited the Torah commandment, "And thou shalt guard thy soul", as the foundation for his judgment that smoking should be considered not only wasteful and unhealthy, but suicidal--and, therefore, sinful.

We are all victims of the curse of smoking. Directly or indirectly, we all suffer because of the abuse of the human body which smoking involves. It is impossible to calculate the wasted money, time, and talent spent on smoking-related diseases. Many of the resources now directed at treating ailments caused or aggravated by smoking could be diverted to treating and curing the numerous catastrophic ailments about which we know so little.

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